

VZCZCXR09110
PP RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHBC #0012/01 0631306
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 041306Z MAR 09
FM REO BASRAH
TO RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0418
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0835
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
RUEHBC/REO BASRAH 0872

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000012

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 3/4/2019

TAGS: PGOV KDEM KIRF I2

SUBJECT: BASRA CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT ELECTION RESULTS, NEW PROVINCIAL COUNCIL

REF: A) BAGHDAD 003929; B) BASRAH 0006

BASRAH 00000012 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Mark O'Connor, Deputy Director, Regional Embassy Office Basrah, Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In two separate meetings, REO discussed local Christian-minority issues with Chaldean Father Emad Aziz al-Banna. Emad, de facto leader of the Christian community in Basra, expressed great satisfaction that Christians now have a designated seat on the Provincial Council (PC). The second meeting with Emad, held at his Christian kindergarten in Basra, included Dr. Saad Matti Potrous, the newly-elected Christian PC member. Matti and Emad embraced the newly-elected Council, characterizing its new members as secular and nationalistic, and did not anticipate any antagonism toward the Christian community by the incoming PC. Matti speculated that Da'wa PC member Dr. Chaltag Abu Sharad would become the next PC Chairman. On security, Emad saw an important continuing role for the United States in Iraq, most notably through economic support and educational programs. End summary.

Christian Representation

¶2. (C) Father Emad, the de facto leader of Basra's Christian community, expressed his satisfaction with the recent provincial elections during an initial meeting at the REO on February 12. Commending the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) and the Iraqi Security Forces for a job well done, he was particularly enthusiastic about the new Christian-designated seat on the PC, remarking that Christian participation in the government was long overdue. Referencing the modern plight of Basra's Christians (See ref A), he explained that government connections were necessary for securing jobs and economic programs. He hoped the new PC, in collaboration with the Christian representative, would work to improve his community's circumstances and encourage many internally-displaced Christians to return home.

Praise for New PC, Especially "State of Law"

¶3. (C) Emad was optimistic about Basra's future and characterized the new PC members as "open-minded, secular, and nationalistic." Emad noted that the nationalist spirit promoted a popular dedication to improving the country and a resistance to foreign influence. He voiced particular approval for Da'wa's "State of Law" coalition, which he said did not have sectarian interests. Emad hoped that the pattern of corruption and domination by an over-powering Chairman or Governor would not be repeated.

¶4. (C) On February 22, the REO Acting Director traveled to Saint Efram Christian Kindergarten in downtown Basra to meet with Emad and newly-elected Christian PC member Dr. Saad Matti Potrous of the Chaldean National Council (657). Matti shared Emad's enthusiasm for the new PC. He described the State of Law coalition as non-sectarian and capable of improving living conditions in Basra. Fresh from a meeting with 18 newly-elected PC members on February 20, Matti stated that he expected a cooperative relationship with the new government, because all the PC members - including those from the Islamic parties - "trust the Christians." He repeated this several times during the meeting.

Da'wa for PC Chair, Governorship Uncertain

¶5. (C) Matti said he was nearly certain that local Da'wa party leader Dr. Chaltag Abu Sharad would soon get the nod for PC Chairman, and Emad enthusiastically agreed. (See ref B) Matti believed Chaltag to be very qualified for the job. Matti had no suggestions as to who the next governor would be, however.

Security Relationship

¶6. (C) Touching on security issues, Emad stated that for the foreseeable future Iraq will need and value US support - if not necessarily military, then at least educational and economic. In the short term, Emad reckoned that US troop involvement would be required until Basra Province was strong enough to stand on its own, although he would not speculate as to how long that might be. Like most Basrawis, he identified security as the Province's primary concern - without which economic development would be impossible.

¶7. (C) Comment: Emad is a very active community leader and he appears particularly insightful on political issues. His

BASRAH 00000012 002.2 OF 002

positive appraisal of the new Provincial Council in general and of Dr. Chaltag in particular is encouraging. His emphasis on the non-sectarian aspect of the State of Law coalition and his concern about corruption and executive dominance offer striking positive comparisons with his opinions on the outgoing PC and Governor Mohammad Wa'eli, who are associated with religious extremism, incompetence, and corruption. Father Emad has been serving as an acting Bishop for some time and will be formally ordained by Baghdad-based Chaldean Patriarch Cardinal Emmanuel III Delly during Sunday Mass on March 8. End comment.

O'CONNOR